VVA CHAPTER 1 – FIRST IN THE NATION

DON BODETTE WAS 'POINT MAN' FOR RUTLAND AREA VIETNAM VETERANS

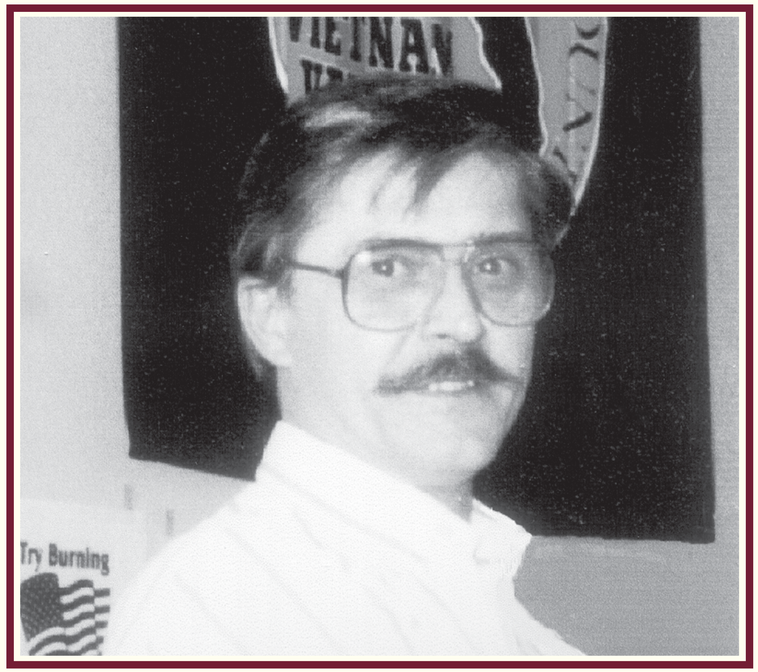
"Together then, together now," was the idea that drove Don Bodette, the Rutland man whose experiences in Vietnam and whose commitment to veterans shaped the national organization, Vietnam Veterans of America.

His efforts began in the 1970s, when memories of the Vietnam War were still fresh. It would be years before post-traumatic stress disorder and Agent Orange would be recognized as part of the war's legacy. Many veterans felt not only the pain of psychological and physical injuries but also the stigma of having served in an unpopular war.

From Don's plainly worded newspaper ad, "Vietnam veterans, we need to talk," began efforts to help veterans cope with a variety of war-related problems. Jake Jacobsen, Albert and Mary Trombley, Mike Dodge, Dennis Ross and Mark Truhan were among others active in those early years.

In 1979, Bobby Muller, the founder of Vietnam Veterans of America, met Don Bodette during a trip to Vermont. Don supported the notion of an organization for Vietnam-era veterans but felt it needed to mobilize locally in chapters to truly succeed. He persuaded Bobby Muller to adopt his model.

Chapter 1 of the Vietnam Veterans of America was established on April 13, 1980, when Bobby Muller presented its charter to Don Bodette.



Don Bodette, leader in the founding of Chapter 1, Vietnam Veterans of America, Rutland, Vermont.

By Memorial Day of 2000, Vietnam Veterans of America had more than 50,000 members, among whom were some 400 in six chapters in Vermont. The organization is devoted to improving the lives of those who served in the Vietnam War, to honoring those who died in all wars, and to friendship among nations.

Don Bodette, 48, died of cancer on Aug. 10, 1997. His work goes on.

The logo for Chapter 1 was designed by Melody Hawkins.

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